

GREENWAY
CHARLES CITY CO., VA.
NEAR CHARLES CITY

HABS NO. 11-23

HABS
VA
19-CHARC.V,
1-

Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORIC AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

DISTRICT NO. 11

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
PHILIP M. STERN, DISTRICT OFFICER
21 LAW BLDG., FREDERICKSBURG, VA.

HABS
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GREENWAY
Near Charles City Court House
Charles City County
Virginia

Owners: Greenway Holding Corporation.

Date of Erection: Pre-Revolutionary. Seventeenth century style,
but built in the eighteenth century.

Architect and Builder: No record.

Present Condition of Main House: Good. Of outbuildings: Poor.
New roof. Main porch removed. Place for sale.

Number of Stories: One and a half.

Materials of Construction: Wood.

Other Existing Records: Letters and Times of the Tylers.
L.G.Tyler: Cradle of the Republic.

Additional Data: See following pages.

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HISTORICAL DATA

This charming example of Early American house was built prior to 1776, near Charles City Courthouse, Charles City County Virginia. In this house was born in the year 1790, John Tyler, Jr., who became Governor of Virginia, 1826 and President of the United States 1841.

President Tyler disposed of "Greenway" in 1821 and acquired it again in 1829. President Tyler died at Richmond, Va. January 17, 1862. The style, details and appointments show the effect of careful planning and pleasing design; the main house and the outlying dependencies being placed in the manner typical of the home of better type of that period.

Main house, outer office, kitchen and slaves quarters are grouped in an harmonious setting. The whole tract of land will approximate 1100 acres.

The present owners of "Greenway" are The Greenway Holding Corporation, of Virginia.

This historic landmark is located on State Highway number 41, about 51 miles east of Richmond, Va.

Reference: Edward F. Sinnott.

" Letters and Times
of John Tyler

Philip R. Stern

Reviewed 1936, H.C.F.

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REPORT ON PRESIDENT TYLER'S BIRTHPLACE
by Charles W. Porter, Assistant Regional
Historian, Third Region, National Park
Service

"Greenway", home of John Tyler, Governor of Virginia, 1808-1811, and the childhood home and birthplace of his son, John Tyler, President of the United States, is located one-half mile from Charles City Courthouse, eight and a half miles from Providence Forge on the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad, and 32½ miles southeast of Richmond. About one mile in front of the house is the James River, but its muddy waters are hidden from view by trees.

The dwelling faces south and has a central hall with rooms on either side, upstairs and down. It is a story and a half high and has picturesque dormer windows. A later addition on to the rear of the house makes the building T shaped.

When the elder John Tyler proposed to sell his estate in 1805 so that his affairs would be straightened out before his death, he described the property as follows:

Richmond Enquirer, September 15, 1805
"For Sale on Private Contract,

Greenway, the seat on which I now reside, including Mons-Sacer and the Court-house tenement, containing in all 1,200 acres of fertile, level farming land (reserving one acre of consecrated ground.) The whole is bounded by two navigable creeks, emptying into James river before the door and forming a bay, therefrom 1,400 yards only; 25 miles to Petersburg by water, 30 to Richmond by land, and 28 to Williamsburg - - - - .

"Greenway contains 500 acres, well improved. On it is a genteel, well finished dwelling-house, containing six rooms, all wainscoted, chair-board high, with fine dry cellars the full length of the house, which is 56 feet; also every other building which a reasonable person could wish or desire, to-wit: a handsome study, storehouse, kitchen, laundry, dairy, meat-house, spinning house, and an ice house within the curtelage; a barn 40 by 34 feet, two granaries, two carriage houses, 20 stalls for horses, a quarter for house-servants; a handsome octagon pigeon-

house, well atocked; and several other houses for slaves; a well of water (so excallent that I can drink it with delight after returning from a mountain circuit); a large, fertile garden, abounding with a great variety of sbrubs, herbs, and beautiful flowers, well enclosed. The buildings new and covered with shingles.

"Mons-Sacer contains 500 acres more or leas, on which is a neat, small dwelling, a mill begun on a never-failing stream, one mile from James rivar and emptying itself therein"

"Greenway" was not sold in 1805 but, upon the death of Governor Tyler in 1813, it descended to Wat Tyler, elder brother of President John Tyler. The latter received the estate called "Mons-Sacer." (Tyler, Lyon G., Letters and Times of the Tylers (3 vols., Richmond, Va., 1884-96) I, 271-272.)

Dr. Lyon G. Tyler, President Tyler's son and an historian by profession, staunchly maintained throughout his life that President Tyler was born at "Greenway" on the 29th of March, 1790. (Tyler, III, 24.) This assertion has been generally accepted by patriotic societies and by Dr. Eckenrode. (Key to Inscriptions on Virginia Highway Historical Markers (1935) 110.)

Judge R. A. Armistead, of Williamsburg, who died about 1914, contested Dr. Tyler's claim that "Greenway" was the President's birthplace, and his son, Judge Frank Armistead of Williamsburg, adheres to his father's opinion. According to Professor James Southall Wilson of the University of Virginia, who married President Tyler's granddaughter (Julia Tyler), Judge R. A. Armistead's contention was based upon nothing more than a boyhood recollection. Dr. Wilson adds that Judge Armistead was an eccentric individual of a naturally argumentative disposition - the sort of person who would argue for the sake of argument itself. Upon being interviewed, Judge Frank Armistead said that his father had pointed out to him a house other than "Greenway" and had remarked that it was Tyler's birthplace; but Frank Armistead admits that he does not know upon what evidence the elder judge based his opinion. Moreover, he said that he did not have any papera or documenta that would uphold the Armistead claim. Under these circumstances we are naturally justified in believing the assertion of Dr. Lyon G. Tyler, historian and son

of the President, who consistently designated "Greenway" as the real birthplace.

In any case, "Greenway" must have been President Tyler's home from about the date of his birth in 1790 until he became of age in 1811. This alone would justify the preservation of the building as a National shrine.

Today the property is badly decayed but the present owners, The Greenway Holding Company, Inc., have carpenters at work repairing the structure which is easily capable of being restored to good condition. The rooms in the east and west wings of the building are paneled "chair-board high" as described in 1805. The length of the house is 56 feet (not counting the chimney at either end.) A number of the old outhouses still stand. The barn is said to be comparatively new.

The Greenway Holding Company, Inc., in addition to the house, possesses 686 acres of land. The house has an assessed value of \$1500. (without considering the improvements and repairs now going on.) The whole estate is valued on the assessment books at \$11,790.00. The assessed value of 424 acres on an adjoining farm is \$5,188.00.

Conclusion: The Charles City County land tax lists for the period 1787-1813 seem to show that the President's father possessed his entire "Greenway" estate by 1790, the year in which John Tyler was born. The estate then had 1069 acres; at the elder Tyler's death in 1813, he had 1037 acres. A general chorus proclaims "Greenway" to be the birthplace of President Tyler. The only dissenting voice is that of the Armisteads who have admitted that they do not know of a single document that would support their point of view. The house itself is in a fair state of preservation and as the home of Governor John Tyler (a Revolutionary Patriot) and as the early home and apparently the birthplace of President John Tyler, it easily merits preservation as a National Monument.

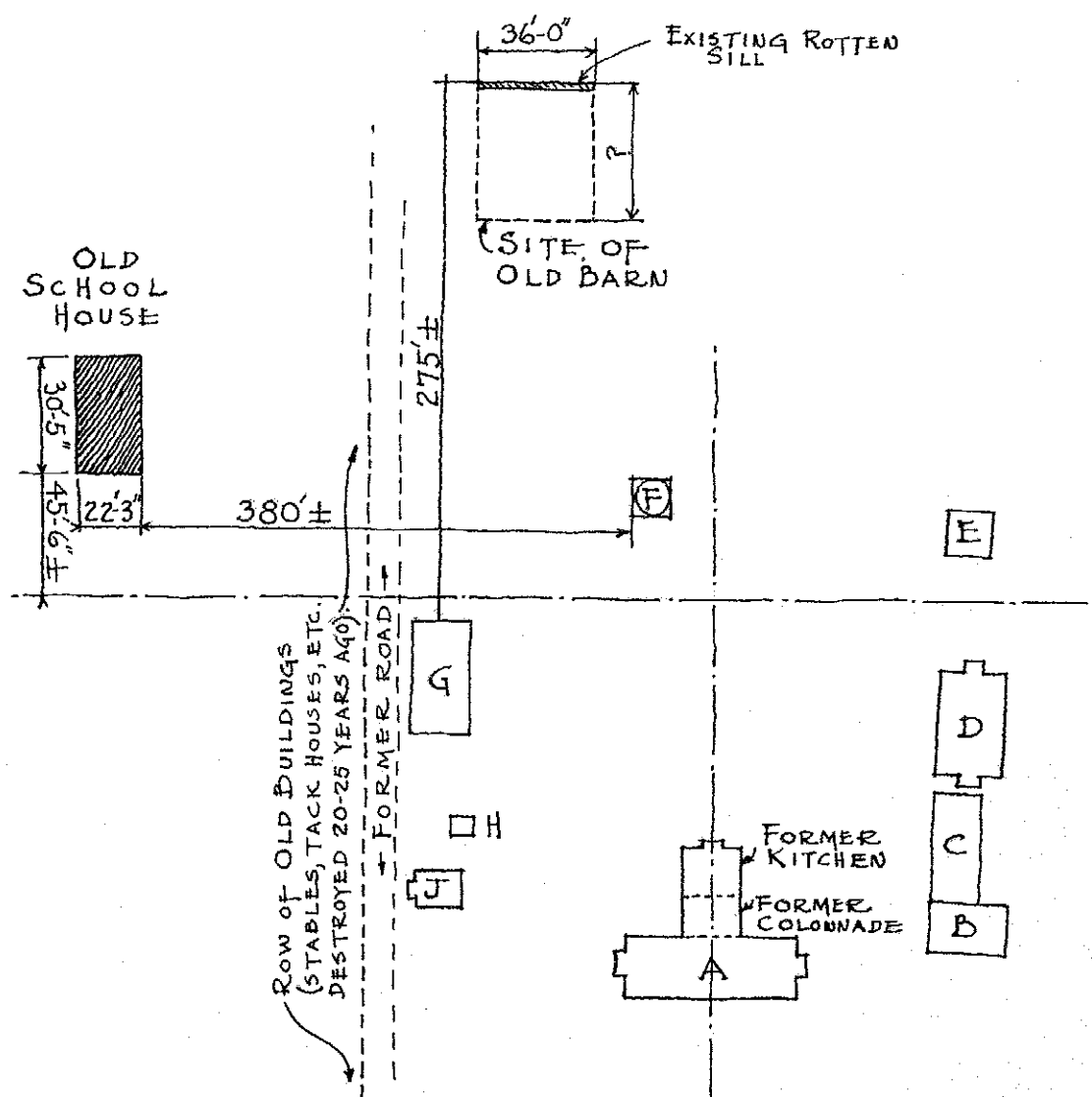
(Signed) Charles W. Porter

Assistant Regional Historian
Third Region

Reviewed 1936, by H.C.F.

THE OLD SCHOOL HOUSE AND BARN AT GREENWAY

VA.
A-CHERRY
15
Fig. 2



LOCATED AND DRAWN
by
HENRY CHANDLEE FORMAN
JAN. 1935.
NOT TO SCALE.

GREENWAY
Near Charles City Court House
Charles City County
Virginia

ARCHITECTURAL NOTES:

In January 1935 the writer took measurements of some of the fascinating outbuildings of the Greenway plantation for the National Park Service.

The old caretaker who had lived forty years at Greenway ¹ gave some valuable contributions to our study of the plantation. These points the writer feels are authentic enough to be included in the following notes. Compare them with sheet #1 of the Historic American Buildings Survey drawings of Greenway.

1. The present study of the main house (A) used to be the kitchen and was connected with the main part of the house by a colonnade or covered passageway.
2. The outbuilding (B) was the slave kitchen. Its wing (C) was the place where the work hands were fed. It is not an old wing and was not measured.
3. Outbuilding (D) was the Laundry and Bakery. The Bakery is the northern half of the building and was built slightly later than the Laundry. That the Bakery was an addition may be seen by the original clapboards on the inside partition in the room over the Bakery. The Bakery chimney was built thirty years ago by a negro to replace the original destroyed chimney which was exactly like

¹ He kept a thirty year old cat. Asked why he always rose at four o'clock in the winter time, he replied that he "jes' got tired a layin' in bed". Dr. Lyon G. Tyler, son of President Tyler who lived at Greenway, slapped the old caretaker on the back and said, "we are getting younger and younger every day ! " One month later Dr. Tyler was dead (February 12, 1935).

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Greenway continued.

the Laundry chimney.

4. The square smoke house, outbuilding (E), has an addition to the south.

5. The school house, now turned into a rat-eaten corn-crib, stands on its original site to the west of the plantation house. It is approximately three hundred eighty feet west of the ice-house pit (F). The school is in very bad condition: all the windows have been boarded up, the sash have gone, the sills have been hollowed by worms and rats, the clapboards are falling off the walls.

6. The old barn has been destroyed, but its northern sill was located on the ground some two hundred seventy-five feet north of the modern Harness house (G). According to the length of this rotten sill, lying on the ground, the barn was thirty-six feet wide. The length was not determinable.

7. The former road ran immediately adjacent to the west sides of Office (J), Harness house (G) and Barn. Along the western edge of the road formerly stood a row of old buildings, such as stables, tack houses, etc. These were destroyed between twenty and twenty-five years ago.

by Henry Chandler Ferman
July 1936